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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 000778

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SR](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: GOC WELCOMES THE RETURN OF THE SERBIAN AMBASSADOR  
AND ROLLS OUT PLANS TO IMPROVE BILATERAL RELATIONS

REF: A. BELGRADE 1059

[1](#)B. ZAGREB 688

[1](#)C. ZAGREB 750

Classified By: Peter D'Amico, Political Officer, for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Following the return of the Serbian Ambassador to Zagreb last week the GoC is working on rolling out plans to improve bilateral relations through high-level visits between the capitals. Croatia's recognition on March 19 of Kosovo's independence, and Belgrade's subsequent decision to recall its ambassador, strained relations between Serbia and Croatia. The Kosovo recognition also provided fuel for ill-tempered rhetorical exchanges between senior officials and the occasional snub of invitations by high-level members of the GoS to events in Croatia. Even during the recent strained period in relations, there were some areas of strong cooperation, especially on the working-levels and on certain issues such as law enforcement and trade. Despite the lack of a Serbian ambassador in Zagreb, the GoC repeatedly stated that it wanted to reach out to the pro-European forces in Serbia, while at the same time encouraging them to see "reality" on Kosovo. The GoC has consistently maintained its strong support for Serbia becoming a member of the EU and NATO. With the return of the Serbian Ambassador the GoC will attempt to warm bilateral ties this winter with Belgrade. Relations, however, will continue to be sensitive. End Summary.

#### Serbian Ambassador Returns

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[1](#)2. (SBU) The Serbian Ambassador to Croatia, Radivoj Cveticanin, returned to Zagreb last week, and on October 31 he had his first official meetings at the Croatian MFA since his departure. Serbia had recalled him to Belgrade after the GoC recognized Kosovo's independence on March 19. The GoS decided on October 9, following the UN General Assembly vote to support Serbia's request for consideration of Kosovo's independence by the International Court of Justice, to return its ambassadors to non-EU countries that had recognized Kosovo (REF A).

#### GoC's Plans for Engagement

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[1](#)3. (C) On October 29, FM Jandrokovic told the Ambassador that, in response to the Serbian Ambassador's return, Croatia would appoint a new ambassador to Belgrade, and there would soon be a visit by the Serbian Minister of Environment and Special Planning Oliver Dulic to meet with his Croatian counterpart, Minister of Environmental Planning Marina Matulovic Dropulic. The MFA confirmed on November 4 that the new Croatian Ambassador to Serbia, Zeljko Kupresak, had received agreement from Belgrade. The Croatian Sabor, with support from the GoC, is also moving forward on arranging a delegation of Croatian parliamentarians from the Foreign Affairs Committee to go to Belgrade to share experiences from

Croatia's EU bid. Sabor contacts said they had proposed the trip to the GoS, and that matters were now in the hand of the Serbian ambassador and Belgrade.

#### Zagreb Paid a Heavier Price For Kosovo Recognition

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14. (C) The GoC is hopeful these steps will promote a thaw in relations with Belgrade. Croatian officials have repeatedly commented how Belgrade seemed to be reacting more sharply to Croatia's recognition of Kosovo than with most other countries, particularly those in the EU. This included harsh statements from senior GoS officials, such as Serbian FM Jeremic's public criticism of the GoC last May, when he used an international conference in Zagreb to accuse Croatia of the "ethnic cleansing" of 250,000 Serbs in the 1990's. The tough talk was not limited to public exchanges. PM Sanader told USG officials that during a private meeting in September on the margins of the UNGA, Serbian President Tadic said that the GoC had made bilateral relations tough by recognizing the independence of Kosovo and warning that Belgrade could create problems in Croatia with its minority Serb community (REF B). Croats also reported that senior figures in the GoS had frequently turned down invitations to events in Croatia as another means of expressing displeasure. Tadic has refused personal invitations from both Sander and President Mesic to attend various multilateral events during the summer where other regional and European leaders would be present.

#### Good Cooperation on the Working-Level

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15. (C) The tensions and public displays at the senior level, have been mitigated, however, by good cooperation at the working level. The Croatian MFA has told us that, despite initial concerns about possible economic retaliation after Kosovo recognition, trade and economic relations in particular have continued to develop at a robust pace over the last six months. Strong ties have also continued in the field of law enforcement. Both acting Croatian Police Director Vladimir Faber and his predecessor Marijan Benko stressed the close and strong cooperation with their Serbian colleagues on law enforcement issues. Following the high-profile murder of Ivo Pukanic in Zagreb on October 23 (REF C), Faber and his Serbian counterpart Milorad Veljonic met at a border crossing on October 30 and announced plans to establish joint teams to fight organized crime.

#### GoC Wants Serbia in the Euro-Atlantic Community

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16. (C) President Mesic, PM Sanader and FM Jandrokovic have all repeatedly stated publicly that while Serbia must reconcile itself to the reality of Kosovo's independence, Croatia also wants Serbia to be a member of Euro-Atlantic institutions. In this vein Marin Zuzul in the MFA's Southeastern Europe Department told post that the GoC welcomed Belgrade's signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU and the formation of Serbia's pro-European government this summer. The GoC does insist that before becoming a member of the EU and NATO Serbia must be fully cooperating with the ICTY, just as Croatia was required to do. (NOTE: One of the two remaining ICTY fugitives, Goran Hadzic, is a rebel Serb leader accused of crimes in Croatia. END NOTE.) But Croatian officials from the senior levels on down consistently argue that having Serbia firmly anchored in the Euro-Atlantic community would build stronger relations between the two countries, which the GoC views as key for stability in the region.

#### Comment

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17. (C) The GoC's effort to broaden contacts, such as via the

parliamentary delegation, are deliberately designed to test the waters upon the return of the Serbian Ambassador to Zagreb, and to try to open a new stage in bilateral relations. The GoC will carefully watch Belgrade's response to these efforts. Some of the wounded feelings from recent rebuffs of invitations will persist, however. Some high-level contacts or visits will likely be needed to get beyond those tensions. END COMMENT.  
Bradtke